

5

10

Ordination Paper

In Partial Fulfillment of Ordination Requirements for the American Baptist Churches

15

Matthew Charles Wigton
First Baptist Church of Rockport

20

4 High Street
Rockport, Massachusetts
01966

25

MattWigton@FirstBaptistRockport.Org

30

July 2010

35

40

45

Autobiographical Sketch and Call to Ministry

I called Worthington, Ohio home for the first eighteen years of my life. During
5 my childhood my parents worked hard to provide for the needs of my sisters and me. In
reflection, I am grateful for the sacrifice and investment they made in my life; both
parents bypassed opportunities to expand their professional careers for the sake of our
family. In addition to the general care and guidance provided by my parents, they were
and remain steady examples of Christian faith and practice. They graciously encouraged
10 my sisters and me to follow their lead in participating in the life of the church. It was thus
as a result of their example and action that I grew up in a good church in Worthington.
Without a doubt, I have been deeply affected by their example and leadership. For many
years my mother has been involved in teaching Sunday school and my father has been an
elder. In retrospect, I realize that the loving, Christ-centered care of my family was
15 pivotal in the journey of my life. My three sisters, parents and I remain close and
communicate frequently.

As a result of the teaching and example of my parents, I confessed my need for
Christ at the age of four. This occurred after my mother read to me from a children's
book about the Apostle Paul. I recall the book describing Paul's escape from a city in a
20 basket. I asked my mother why Paul was involved in these events. She described the way
in which Paul was undergoing persecution because of the message of Christ that he was
proclaiming. She encouraged me to realize that I too could embrace the message Paul
preached. In light of this event, I responded the call to acknowledge Christ as Savior and
Lord. When I was approximately eight, I was baptized during a Sunday evening service
25 at my church. This celebration of my desire to follow God was an important moment in

my spiritual journey as I publicly declared my yearning to follow the Triune God. I am eternally obliged to my parents and church for leading me to Christ.

I grew up in a large church of approximately 3,000, loosely affiliated with the fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches. Early in life I recall helping my mother teach
5 Sunday school and helping my father deliver food to people in need. Following their example, I taught elementary and middle school-aged Sunday school for about eight years, served as a deacon for two years, assisted with baptisms, preached at nursing homes and helped to start and maintain a visitor follow-up program. Before leaving for seminary, I interned in the youth ministries department, helping manage the summer
10 youth program. I was involved with this church for twenty-three years and am grateful for what I learned and experienced within this manifestation of Christ's body.

While this church played a key role in my life and prepared me for vocational ministry, vocational ministry was not initially part of my plans. In my youth, I enjoyed playing outside, participating in sports and spending time with friends. Very early in life,
15 I also developed a keen interest in the world around me. As early as age five, I recall watching the national news and asking questions about events that were reported. This interest in world events grew into a great passion. At times this was a challenge as my interests were sometimes not the same as my peer group. Nonetheless, my interest in domestic, national and global affairs increased as I grew. In Junior High School this lead
20 to a job as a reporter with the Kids News Network. KNN was a Saturday morning television program on the Central Ohio CBS affiliate (WBNS 10TV). In the middle of High School, I began an internship with a Columbus and Washington, D.C. - based public affairs consulting firm that lasted four years. This firm worked closely with

members of various state and national legislative and executive bodies. While I was merely an intern, I learned much about public affairs and business. I enrolled in The Ohio State University (OSU). Upon my initial entrance into college, I continued involvement in many of the same activities, with the goal of attending law school.

5 In the middle of my time at OSU, I began to question my goals and focus in life. Simultaneously, I became involved in Campus Crusade for Christ (CCC) at OSU. This participation included leading Bible studies, mission trips and serving as a representative to the university activity board. With CCC, I participated in several domestic and international mission trips.

10 As a result of this period of questioning and the subsequent involvement with CCC, I became convinced that I had to make a decision about the relationship between Christianity and my goals in life. While I had always affirmed the central tenants of Christianity, my time in college confirmed what I had confessed as a child. I realized that many of my motives in life to that point had been for my own advancement and pursuit
15 of happiness. If the life, claims and call of Christ were legitimate, I was convinced that I needed to reorient my life around the good news of Jesus Christ. I also became increasingly convinced that the true hope of humanity is found in Christ and that the local church is the chief agent in the proclamation and development of this news. While I still believe there is great value in the fields of law and public policy, I decided I needed to
20 leave these fields and focus on the work of the Church. Therefore, midway through college I switched from preparing for law school to looking at seminaries. Through my involvement in CCC, I developed a heart for challenging ministry environments. In particular I was drawn to the need for church renewal in Western Europe and New

England. For this reason and because of its widely respected scholarship, biblical fidelity, theological acumen and global outreach I chose to attend Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (GCTS).

5 In 2005, I graduated with a Bachelor of Science from The Ohio State University and began attendance at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in South Hamilton, Massachusetts. I received my Master of Divinity at GCTS in May of 2009.

10 In March of 2006, I began serving as the youth worker at the Cape Neddick Baptist Church in York, Maine, in conjunction with the Mentored Ministry program at GCTS and out of my desire to be involved in church revitalization. In my position at Cape Neddick, I developed and maintained a youth ministry and a youth Sunday school. While my central focus was the youth, the church was without a full time pastor the majority of my time in attendance, giving me an opportunity to help in other areas of church life including preaching, visiting homebound members, counseling and leading worship. Several tragic events occurred within this church community and I was able to provide assistance, care and leadership during these difficult times. I was committed to Cape Neddick Baptist Church until being called to Rockport in September 2008. During my time at Cape Neddick I was mentored and overseen by several American Baptist pastors including Linwood “Woody” Welch, Richard Visser, Carsten Lotz and Robert Hinckley. I loved my experience there and gained an understanding and deep affinity for the smaller, historical churches of New England.

20 In October 2008, I married Megan Campbell. Megan and I met at GCTS, where she received a Master of Theology. Megan is an amazing woman who has a heart for ministry and has played an active and important role at the First Baptist Church in

Rockport. Megan is a great friend and encouragement within ministry and life. Not only does she support my work in ministry, we regularly partner in various aspects of ministry. She currently works in the Chapel Office at Gordon College. I am grateful to God for bringing us together and excited about our future journey. We look forward to starting a family in the future and hope to be committed to the church in Rockport for many years.

After several months of interviews I was called to the First Baptist Church of Rockport as the “pastoral candidate” in September of 2008. This was a unique role created by the board of Deacons and interim pastor Merle “Skip” Pimentel. In this role, I trained with Skip and ascertained whether or not there was potential for a long-term relationship with the church. Throughout a period of eight months, I worked very closely with Skip and the church boards until in May of 2009 the church voted to call me as the full time pastor. I began full time in July of 2009 and have loved my experience with the body of Christ at the First Baptist Church of Rockport, Massachusetts.

15

Theological Beliefs

God The Father

I believe that the Triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – are coeternal and coexistent. The Triune God is perfect and holy. The Triune God is supreme over all time, space and creation. The Triune God exists in perfect fellowship while assuming different roles and maintaining equal status and worth.¹

God the Father is sovereign, omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, and immutable.² God is righteous, loving, gracious and kind. He is the sustainer of all that

¹ Genesis 1:26, 22; Isaiah 6:8; John 1:1-3, 15:26; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 10:21-24

² Psalm 135:6; Numbers 23:19; Malachi 3:6; Ephesians 1:4-5; James 1:17

exists. He was, is and always will be. His creativity and beauty is evidenced in the world around, through the order of the world and through the desires of the human spirit. He is outside of time and space and yet has evidenced a desire to enter into fellowship with his creation within the parameters of time and space. God's desire to be in relationship with humanity demonstrates his love for men and women. The supreme excellence of God cannot be completely grasped by humanity, however there is a picture of God through his revelation in Christ, the scriptures and through the works of his hands. Through his revelation in Christ, there exists an expanded picture of God's redemptive work, desires and will for the world.³

10 God is to be worshiped as God alone. There is nothing or no one else like God. "The Fear of God is the beginning of knowledge."⁴ Humanity finds its greatest fulfillment in worshiping, serving and being in relationship with the Triune God.⁵

God the Son

15 Jesus is the second person within the Triune God. Jesus is completely human and completely God. He was active in the creation of the world.⁶ He came to make known the Father and serves to testify to the will and plan of the Father.⁷ Jesus is the revelation of God. He will judge humanity.⁸ While existing eternally with the Father, he came into the world through the virgin birth in the town of Bethlehem.⁹ Jesus lived a sinless life on earth and in so doing was able to function as the perfect sacrifice in his death on the

20

³ Genesis 1; Psalm 8; John 10:30; Luke 22:66-71; Romans 1:20; Colossians 1:26; Revelation 22:13

⁴ Proverbs 1:7, 9:10

⁵ Exodus 20:1-3; Deuteronomy 6:4-9; John 4:21-24; Ephesians 3:7-12

⁶ Genesis 1:1; John 1:1; Hebrews 1:2; Revelation 1:4

⁷ Mark 9:7; Matthew 21:33-46; Luke 9:18-20; John 5:19-41; I John 1:1-9

⁸ John 5:22; Matthew 25:31-46; Acts 17:31

⁹ Matthew 1:18-23; Luke 1:26-56

cross.¹⁰ During his earthly ministry, Jesus set the course for the beginning of the church. He was crucified as a criminal on account of his claims to be God.¹¹ Three days following Jesus' death by crucifixion, he was physically resurrected from the dead.¹² Wherefore the resurrection is the key event upon which the claims of Christianity rise or fall. The resurrection verified Jesus' claims to deity and through conquering the grave Jesus authenticated his claims of resurrection and life.¹³ The reality of the resurrection today remains the central reason for placing faith in Jesus and receiving his promise of eternal life.

Following Jesus' resurrection he appeared on the earth to many individuals, many would later give their own lives as a result of proclaiming their witness to the resurrection. Jesus gave the "Great Commission" to the church as its central mission in the time period following the resurrection.¹⁴ Jesus ascended to Heaven and has promised that he will one day return in the Second Advent. In the Second Advent, Jesus will bring about his final, perfect kingdom upon the earth.¹⁵

In Jesus' life, death and resurrection he perfectly fulfilled the role of priest, king and prophet foreshadowed throughout the Old Testament. He is the Messiah or anointed one referenced in the Old Testament.¹⁶ Jesus fulfilled the law of the Old Testament while also reaffirming the decrees of God for humanity.¹⁷

20

¹⁰ Hebrews 7:26-28, 8:6; Matthew 4:1-11; Ephesians 1:17-19

¹¹ John 8:58, 18:6; Matthew 12:8; Mark 14:52; Luke 22:66-71

¹² Luke 24; Matthew 28; I Corinthians 15:1-34

¹³ John 11:25-26; John 2:31-33; I Corinthians 15:21

¹⁴ Matthew 28:18-20

¹⁵ Matthew 25:26, 28:20; Acts 1:6-11

¹⁶ Isaiah 42:1-4; Zechariah 3:8; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Mark 12:10; Luke 22:35-38; Romans 15:8-13

¹⁷ Luke 24:44; Romans 3:31, 3:24

God The Spirit

The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Triune God. The Holy Spirit has been eternally existent and has operated in special occasions throughout the redemptive narrative.¹⁸ He was specifically sent forth by Christ to continue Christ's ministry within the world.¹⁹ Jesus spent a significant amount of time preaching about the role of the Holy Spirit, whose function is primarily to elucidate for people the claims of Jesus and to affirm the nature of his call. The Holy Spirit was specifically sent as a comforter to guide and provide for the church after Christ's ascension. The Holy Spirit began his church-wide ministry at Pentecost and continues as the advocate, paraclete or helper who today gives guidance, conviction and solace to the Christian.²⁰

The Holy Spirit is an active participant in calling a person to follow Christ, and also in serving to bring about a life bearing spiritual fruit. The Spirit uniquely gifts each Christian with particular gifts, which are to be used for the glory of God and the edification of the Church.²¹ The Holy Spirit also serves to convict the world and the church both of sin and righteousness. Today the central role of the Holy Spirit is to magnify the Son, who in turn magnifies the Father.

The glorious nature of the Triune God must compel one to humility, awe and worship.

20

¹⁸ Psalm 51:1; Joel 2:28-29; Mark 12:35

¹⁹ John 14:16, 16:13; Luke 24:49; Matthew 28:19; Acts 1:4-5

²⁰ Romans 8:9; John 16:23; 2 Corinthians 3:3

²¹ I Corinthians 12:7; Galatians 5:16-25

Humanity

All men and women are uniquely and wonderfully created in the image of God.

The beauty and worth of God's work in humanity is evidenced from the child in the womb to the elderly alike across the diverse expanse of the globe.²² Likewise all other

5 aspects of God's creation are good and have value. Humanity however holds a special place in that it alone is created in the image of God. Humanity is unique in that it is responsible to God. To be created in the image of God means that humanity shares some of the characteristics that describe God such as his creativity, emotiveness, capacity for relationship, rationality and an innate sense of morality. Each human has been gifted with
10 a soul, which is eternal and conscious. Humanity was created to be in communion with God and to serve as faithful stewards of the created order.²³

Humanity fell short of God's decrees and desires, seeking to follow its own desires instead of worshipping God.²⁴ All humanity is equally responsible for violating God's desires, decrees and law and apart from God's grace and intervention is deprived
15 and worthy of God's full judgment.²⁵ Today sin and death are a result of humanity's rebellion against God.²⁶ All people share universal longings for meaning, hope, answers, love and justice, which are a reflection of God's image and are only completely satisfied through a redemptive act of the Triune God.²⁷

20

²² Genesis 1:26; Psalm 8:4; Mark 10:6; James 3:9

²³ Genesis 1:28; Psalm 104:14-15; I Corinthians 10:31; I Peter 4:8-11

²⁴ Genesis 3; Judges 10:11; Jeremiah 8:6; Matthew 23:33-36

²⁵ Isaiah 53:6; Jeremiah 17:9; Mark 10:18; John 8:34; Galatians 4:8

²⁶ Psalm 14:1; John 11:35; 16:20-21; Romans 1:18, 3:23

²⁷ Psalm 19; John 10:10; Acts 3:21; Romans 8:19-20

Salvation

Throughout scripture, there is a continual picture of the gracious, just and loving nature of God. Routinely within this redemptive story, humanity is shown to forget God's plans and ways. Likewise, God is continually seen to be gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.²⁸ From the early pages of scripture, there is evidenced a picture of God's desire to have a community that worship him. The redemptive story promises that God would send one to provide redemption for the fallen state of humanity.²⁹

Redemption from God is necessary because the potent sin of humanity makes it impossible to find the necessary agent of redemption within the enlightenment, progress and industry of humankind. Human violation of God's decrees requires an act correcting such transgression. The sacrificial system of the Old Testament illustrated the requirement that the people of God had to make for the penalty of their sins. All of the sacrifices of the Old Testament prefigured the need for a greater sacrifice, a permanent and perfect sacrifice, which would provide ultimate redemption. Christ thus in his death and resurrection provided the means by which men and women may find redemption and atonement for sins.³⁰

The "good news" of salvation is that in Jesus' life, death and resurrection there has been provided a means by which humanity may receive new life in Christ. Humanity does not find its merit and right standing before God based upon its own work, but entirely upon the completed work of Christ. To receive salvation or to become a Christian

²⁸ Exodus 34:6; Numbers 14:18; 2 Chronicles 30:9; Nehemiah 9:17; Psalm 103:8; Joel 2:13

²⁹ Genesis 3:15; 2 Samuel 7: 4-17; Jeremiah 33; Isaiah 54:8

³⁰ John 3:16-21; 6:35; 8:12; 10:14; Acts 2:36; I Corinthians 1:18; Galatians 2:15

means to confess the absolute Lordship of Christ and to receive the gracious work of Christ as one's justification or right standing before God. Salvation is thus, in faith, embracing the gracious, justifying work of Christ alone.³¹

5 The message of salvation in Christ was crucial to the work and ministry of Jesus and it remains the crucial message of the church. Implicit in the message of salvation is the promise that all who are in Christ receive the guarantee of eternal life in Christ.³² The Christian following departure from this life will immediately enter heaven and will also be present and active in the future resurrection. This future resurrection will occur in the new heavens and the new earth, a place free from the tyranny of sin and death.³³ The
10 promises of salvation in Christ are deep and lasting.

New life that is found in Christ will be demonstrated by a life that bears witness to the work of the Holy Spirit. This new life that comes with Christ requires death to the old self and a desire to live for God and others. Therefore those who have embraced the message of salvation in Christ should seek to be imitators of God, living in daily
15 communion with God. The scope of God's love in Christ is so magnificent that it should produce a passionate desire to spread the message of the Triune God in word and deed with grace and truth.³⁴

The gift of salvation is ultimately a gracious act of the Triune God whereby he reveals how and why one can call him Father. Through the revelation of God in salvation,
20 the Triune God is hallowing his name, establishing his kingdom and doing his will on earth as it is in heaven.

³¹ Galatians 5:14; Romans 5:15; Ephesians 2:8-9; I Peter 1:3

³² John 14:1-12; Luke 23:43; Philippians 1:21; I Thessalonians 4:13

³³ I Corinthians 15:55; Revelation 21:4

³⁴ Luke 9:23; Matthew 12:33-37; Romans 13:14; Galatians 5:25

Scripture

The sixty-six books of the Canon are divinely inspired and are to be the final guide of faith and practice for the Church of Christ. The central focus of the scriptures is the person and work of Jesus Christ and the way in which the scriptures reveal and point the world towards Jesus is critical to what makes them important. Jesus is the means whereby God accomplished redemption. The Bible is the central source for learning about Christ and the way in which God became flesh and lived within the world. In addition to magnifying Christ, the Bible also elucidates the redemptive story and work by which men and women can have eternal fellowship with God.³⁵

In addition to the manner in which the Bible reveals God's redemptive plan it also reveals the ways in which God has called his people to live. The Decalogue or Ten Commandments are the original summary of God's law and are reaffirmed by Christ in the New Testament.³⁶ God's commands are a furtherance of God's love for humanity and reflect his wisdom and order.³⁷ The law also reminds us of God's love in that while humans cannot perfectly fulfill the law, Christ has. Therein the law both shows the Christian how to live, but also draws the Christian back to God's grace in Christ when the law is not followed. A robust understanding of Christ's atoning sacrifice is thus necessary for understanding the Christian Canon.

The assertion that the Bible is authoritative means that it should be central in discerning matters of faith and practice in both the church and in the life of the individual

³⁵ John 20:30-31; Luke 1:3; Ephesians 3:1-6; I John 5:13

³⁶ Exodus 20:1-17; Deuteronomy 5:1-21; Matthew 5-6, 15:7-9; 19:1-12, 19:16-30, 22:34-39; John 5:19-47

³⁷ Psalm 1, 119:105; Galatians 5:1

Christian.³⁸ The reader should seek to ascertain the message of the text in light of the redemptive narrative. It is important for each individual Christian to engage in personal study and meditation of the scriptures an act that should be valued, encouraged and affirmed by all members of the body of Christ.³⁹

5 Through individual and corporate study of the scriptures a person should also prayerfully seek God’s guidance and illumination through the Holy Spirit in understanding and interpreting the scriptures.⁴⁰ Scriptural adherence and learning can and should be greatly enhanced through consulting historical and contemporary scholarship as well as voices in different parts of the church both theologically and globally.

10

The Church

The global and eternal church is the collection of disciples who confess that Jesus is Lord.⁴¹ The church finds its only hope in the work, guidance and worship of the Triune God.⁴² This hope is the promise of resurrection. The hope of the resurrection should

15 motivate the church to discipleship and mission in the present. To a certain degree the church is called to mirror the perfect fellowship that exists within the relational nature of the Triune God. The church is called to maintain and encourage both faithful doctrine and practice and is called to be a physical representation of Christ’s body.⁴³ The church

20 throughout history has had a turbulent course of conflict and mistakes. This is because of human fallibility. However the church is a continual testament to God’s grace and

³⁸ Luke 1:70; Acts 1:16; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 2:20-21

³⁹ Matthew 28:20; 2 Timothy 2:2; Acts 7:11; I Corinthians 15:3

⁴⁰ I Corinthians 1:6-13; I Thessalonians 2:13-15

⁴¹ Mathew 16:18; Acts 2:14-41; Acts 11:26; Colossians 1:18

⁴² John 15:5; Romans 6:5; Galatians 2:15-21; I John 1:5-10

⁴³ John 16:15; Ephesians 3:10; Romans 15:13; Philippians 12:12-13

sustenance in that it has prevailed for so long against numerous challenges and has continued to hearken back to the same message and has done great good in times of darkness.⁴⁴ The church is central to Triune God's desire to work within the world in the period prior to his second advent.

5 There are two vital roles the church is called to exercise, which mirror Christ's life and are directly connected to his teaching. First, the church is to teach and discern doctrine namely those beliefs, which hold Christianity together and have been consistently taught within scripture and the church.⁴⁵ Having a right view of God is important because it defines the identity and practice of an individual or group. All
10 persons are profoundly shaped by their view of God. Secondly, the church is called to encourage and facilitate the practice of the Christian faith.⁴⁶ This is the practical "living out" of the Christian faith, demonstrated through providing ways and encouraging people to love God and love their neighbor. Doctrine and practice are key to a vibrant and growing church. These two foci ultimately stem from the Great Commission and the
15 Great Commandment, which must be at the heart of the work of the church.⁴⁷

 The church is described as a body with many parts. With Jesus as the head of the body, individual Christians form parts of the body, parts comprised of unique functions but equal importance. Each Christian should desire the building up of the church, since when the body is working well together, the church will be doing its job most
20 effectively.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Mark 10:35-42; Acts 15:36-41; I Corinthians 1:13-17; Philippians 1:18

⁴⁵ Luke 9:20; John 8:21-28; 2 Timothy 2:2; Titus 2:1

⁴⁶ Matthew 5-7; Mark 8:34; Acts 2:42-47; Ephesians 5:1-2; 2 John 6

⁴⁷ Deuteronomy 6:4-5; Mark 12:28-34; Luke 6:43-45; Matthew 28:16-20; Acts 17:10

⁴⁸ I Corinthians 12:12-31; Galatians 5:16-25; Ephesians 1:11-22; Romans 12:3-8

The church is also to be viewed as an embassy of the Kingdom of God – the central reality in the existence of the church. In this role the Church is called to graciously live in the world and yet cautiously resist the voices that promote the spirit of the age. The church should demonstrate that there is an alternative way to living life other than in service to the fleeting kingdoms of this world. The Church awaits the final advent of Christ and therein the consummation of the Kingdom. Nonetheless the church must live as subjects of God’s Kingdom and in so doing paint a picture of the Kingdom of God.⁴⁹

10

The Ordinances

There are two ordinances that have been established by Christ and passed on to the church. These two ordinances are baptism and communion - two symbolic events rich with significance. Their import is found in what they represent and the manner in which they function within the individual and the corporate life of the church.

15

Baptism

The command to be baptized was declared within the Great Commission and baptism was widely practiced in the first century church.⁵⁰

20

Baptism is first a public declaration of one’s desire to embrace the forgiveness offered in Christ. The waters of baptism represent the blood of Christ. The act of going into the water and coming back up can be viewed as a picture of Christ’s cleansing blood.

⁴⁹ Matthew 6:9-13; John 16:20, 18:36; Mark 1:15; Hebrews 12:28; Romans 14:17

⁵⁰ Matthew 3:13-17, 28:19; Mark 16:16; Acts 1:5

Baptism thus represents the way in which this individual is personally proclaiming his or her acceptance of the forgiveness, which God offers in Christ.⁵¹

Secondly, baptism symbolizes the way in which the Christian is called to die to his or her own desires and put on a new person in Christ. This new person is then to live
5 for Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit. The act of entering the water symbolizes dying to self and coming back out of the water symbolizes being alive in Christ. This act recognizes the requirement for Christ in the work of salvation and sanctification.⁵²

Finally, baptism represents the degree to which the Christian is called to witness to the Lord by participating in a community of faith and the world at large. Baptism is a
10 public event, because being a Christian requires participation in a community and witness within the world. Furthermore, the church community should celebrate baptism and view it as a time to encourage a brother or sister in their journey with Christ. In becoming a Christian, one joins in a community of faith and baptism is a key event within this
community.⁵³

15

Communion

Communion is an ordinance that Christ established in the Upper Room in the hours before his betrayal and crucifixion. It has subsequently been practiced in various forms throughout the history of the church. Today, Jesus is the Passover Lamb, through whose shed blood and body the church finds life. Thus the communion service recalls the
20 reason for and the means by which he died. The bread and cup represent what Christ did and said and should serve to be a regular time of reflection, repentance and refocus.

Communion should be celebrated on a regular basis. The time should be used to remind

⁵¹ Acts 16:31-33; I Peter 3:21; Romans 6:1-4; Galatians 3:23-29

⁵² Matthew 16:24; Philippians 2:1-11; Romans 8:2; I Corinthians 15:45

⁵³ Matthew 5:14-16; Acts 2:42-47; Philemon 6-8; 2 Corinthians 2:13

people of the necessity of reflecting upon their state before God and their state before humanity. Communion is observed through Christians being invited to take the bread, which represents Christ's body. Secondly, the cup is to be taken, which represents Christ's blood and the new covenant. In this event the church proclaims Christ's death
5 until he comes again.⁵⁴

Attitude toward American Baptist Churches USA, its ecumenical witness and Code of Ethics

10 The American Baptist Churches have a rich history within the world. In my involvement at the First Baptist Church of Rockport I have witnessed this vibrant history firsthand, particularly through many hours spent researching the history of this local church. The First Baptist Church of Rockport began meeting in 1804 as a result of the dramatic conversion of Captain Nathanael Hale. Hale, an Atlantic ship captain came to
15 grips with his need for Christ during a severe ocean storm much like his contemporary John Newton. Hale, along with local merchant Ebenezer Pool, began leading a group in Pool's house, which remains standing on the corner of Rockport's Dock Square. These founders desired to worship the Triune God, free of state intervention. Their faith and determination quickly gained an increasing number of fellow worshippers, as well as
20 garnered pressure from the general culture. During a beach baptism, a cannon was fired with blanks so as to disrupt the Baptist worshippers. A dog was also baptized across the beach in mockery of the Baptist piety. Founding Deacon Ebenezer Pool recounts in his writings losing many customers because of his decision to break away from state sanctioned worship. There are many more stories connected with the two hundred and

⁵⁴ Luke 22:14-23; Mark 14:22-25; I Corinthians 11:17-34

eight years of worship practiced at this little white church in the park. The stories of God's faithfulness and the tenacity of his people at First Baptist compare well with other examples of churches within the ABC that also share a rich history of faithfulness in Christian worship.

5 Jesus came into a specific time and place, and the church is called to likewise exhibit incarnational ministry within specific times and places. A specific local church has advantage and insight into its particular community. The ABC encourages the growth and operation of the local church, which is another noteworthy characteristic of the ABC.

10 Lastly, one of the major motivations for the founding of the ABC was for the support and mobilization of missions. The ABC continues to support missions throughout the world. Missions are the proclamation and demonstration of God's love in Christ. Adoniram Judson after whom our Church Association is named is one example of many who have served as Baptist missionaries proclaiming the gospel to the ends of the earth. As one of the first missionaries to leave from the United States, Judson introduced the
15 gospel to many in Burma and was pivotal in developing the first Burmese edition of scripture. His example has set the course for many western missionaries throughout the last three centuries. The robust emphasis on missions is yet another reason to be part of the American Baptist Churches. The American Baptist Church's rich history, emphasis on the local church and support of missions provokes one to an attitude of excitement and
20 joy.

 Another important aspect of the history and identity of the ABC is its ability to work with churches in other traditions. Jesus did not start a denomination but rather a community of disciples. While it is valuable to recognize the importance and distinctives

of particular denominations and traditions, it is also important to recognize oneself and one's tradition in light of history and global Christianity. A big-picture view of the church serves to keep one humble but also allows for greater effectiveness as churches seek to partner for various endeavors. Working with other churches is important in

5 keeping with the wider mission of the church.

The Code of Ethics is an important tool in holding accountable the sacred responsibility of clergy. I have signed it and will seek to abide by its terms.

10

15